

Past, Present and Future: Acknowledging Indigenous Achievement and Aspiration in Higher Education

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The number of Indigenous students enrolled in higher education is increasing. Yet parity with the proportion of domestic students attending university remains some way off. This review outlines the efforts that have been made to reduce the gap in Indigenous staff and student outcomes. Looking at the Australian higher education sector in 20 years' time the authors ask what is the future for senior Indigenous appointments and the aspiration of including Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum? The review identifies one pathway to Indigenous workforce outcomes is through postgraduate programs. It describes efforts underway to embed Indigenous perspectives into the broader curriculum. The review concludes with some optimism that Indigenous Australian outcomes are gradually moving from the margins to the centre of universities missions albeit at a pace that will need to improve to achieve parity by 2040.

Keywords: Indigenous student education; Indigenous knowledge.

I. Introduction

In 2017 there are unprecedented numbers of Indigenous students studying at Australian universities. There are more senior Indigenous staff than ever before and most universities have some Indigenous outcomes included in institutional strategic plans. As well, many—though not all—of the Indigenous Higher Education Centres, once largely student support focused,

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have morphed into fully-fledged schools or departments progressing teaching and research in Indigenous studies, alongside student support. There is also an increasing array of Indigenous led research centres. Curricula, particularly in the professions, now includes discipline relevant Indigenous perspectives (Jackson, Power, Sherwood, & Geia, 2013). It would be tempting to think that this change has just occurred naturally over time. However, that would be to overlook the vital work done by Indigenous staff, both academic and professional.

Although the picture is not all rosy—the pace of change is unevenly distributed across the sector (Moreton-Robinson, Walter, Singh & Kimber, 2011). The benchmarks for success set by the 1989 National Aboriginal Education Policy have yet to be met (Day, Nakata, Nakata & Martin, 2015). Moreover, some Indigenous Centres have been recently dismantled, with student support services centralized and academics dispersed to the disciplines, with seemingly little recognition of the significant role played by these centres. More than thirty years ago the all Indigenous National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) petitioned the government for support centres to buttress their 1000 Indigenous Teachers initiative, recognising Indigenous students would require additional support to be successful in the often isolating environments of universities (Holt & Morgan, 2016). Despite myriad challenges, these centres have been the engine rooms of Indigenous achievement in Higher Education, simultaneously nurturing student growth, driving institutional reform and producing the leaders of the future. This work has often been done with limited resources, in university environments ranging from deeply supportive, indifferent, to overtly hostile. Indeed, many current Indigenous leaders in Higher Education have worked in Indigenous Centres at one time or another.

Although much of the rhetoric and the writing regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in higher education is expressed in terms of deficits, gaps or comparisons, it masks an increasingly vibrant Indigenous sector emerging from the margins (and marginalisation) of higher education. In March 2017 Indigenous leaders stood beside non-Indigenous leaders, as Universities Australia launched their first comprehensive Indigenous strategy (Universities Australia, 2017a). The strategy calls for better Indigenous outcomes in key areas of higher education such as student success, curriculum, research, and workforce. It is a document designed to galvanise action in a sector which, more than thirty years ago, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommended could do much to contribute to greater equity for Indigenous Australian (Johnston, 1991). Universities Australia (UA), an organisation led by non-Indigenous people, has had little formal involvement with Indigenous Australians until relatively

recently when Indigenous appointments were made to each of UA's major committees. What is clear though, from the very outset of the document, is the leadership of Indigenous Australians. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consortium Higher Education (NATSIHEC) are acknowledged as working closely with UA in the development of the document. What is less clear is that the strategy is the culmination of more than a decade of concerted Indigenous action in Australian Higher Education and sits at the crest of a wave of momentum built through Indigenous representations to the *Review of Higher Education* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008), and a trio of Indigenous higher education reports.

It is possible to follow threads of attention to Indigenous outcomes though the *Review of Higher Education* (Bradley, et al., 2008), the *National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities* (Universities Australia, 2011), *National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy* (IHEAC, 2011) and the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly, 2012). The genesis of the Behrendt Review, for example, can be traced to Recommendation 30 of the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley et al., 2008 p. 159):

That the Australian Government regularly review the effectiveness of measures to improve higher education access and outcomes for Indigenous people in consultation with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council.

However, if we look further, it is possible to trace this recommendation back to the submission made to the Bradley Review by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Committee (IHEAC¹). This all Indigenous ministerial advisory group was appointed to provide policy advice to the Federal government on the matters related to Indigenous Australians in Higher Education. The Council (IHEAC, 2006), which first met in March 2005, quickly identified a set of priorities, including student retention and success, researcher development, greater recognition of Indigenous studies and workforce and governance issues. The IHEAC (2008) submission to the *Review of Higher Education* emphasised the entrenched under-representation of Indigenous peoples in higher education, calling for the national approach to the ongoing inequity that would echo through the Behrendt Review and finally find expression in Universities Australia's strategy.

In his recent incisive address to the Victorian Women's Trust, Dr Richard Denniss argued persuasively that "evidence is what you need when

you are not powerful” (Denniss, 2016), although he cautioned that the collecting of evidence keeps the powerless busy while obscuring inaction on the part of the powerful. Each of the reports noted above critically developed considerable bodies of evidence, illuminating the results of government and institutional inertia; too few Indigenous students, insufficient Indigenous staff, and inadequate cultural competency of university staff. Incrementally, momentum has gathered with each fresh layer of evidence pointing to the under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which sits at the very heart of inequity in Australian Higher Education. As noted by Universities Australia (2017a), evidence of long-standing under-achievement—not by Indigenous Australians—by institutions.

Our brief, for this paper, was to explicate Indigenous higher education for people who might be unfamiliar with this area. Although there remains considerable work to be done, we want to highlight some of the extraordinary changes that have occurred in Indigenous higher education over the last decade or so, while charting the remarkable work of Indigenous people which has driven the change. For this reason, we sometimes use the names of individuals. This is not to minimise the work of non-Indigenous allies but rather to underscore our own agency in this domain. We chart this success through focus on two specific areas of under-representation highlighted in the aforementioned reports; student outcomes, workforce—specifically senior Indigenous appointments—and one area of aspiration; Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum. We write from the perspectives of three Indigenous academics, with lengthy and varied experience working in higher education, including senior management positions in Indigenous Centres. Finally, we wish to look to the future and imagine the changes that might be wrought by the current burst of activity. First, we provide a further brief background to two key, but often confused, areas in Indigenous higher education.

2. Distinguishing Indigenous studies and Indigenous student education

Indigenous higher education includes two separate but aligned areas; Indigenous studies and Indigenous student education. Historically the research, teaching and administration associated with these two activities have grown from similar roots in the Indigenous Centres (Ma Rhea & Russell, 2012). Although in recent years, sometimes through misguided reference to the ‘whole of university’ approaches recommended by the Behrendt Review, these two areas have separated and flourished in a variety

of ways, depending on the institution and their particular staffing profile. The first area, relates to the emerging discipline of Indigenous studies and includes Indigenous pedagogy and Indigenous research methodologies as well as a plethora of interdisciplinary research in fields such as education, law and the health sciences. Indigenous studies research is burgeoning, particularly internationally and is characterized by some key ideas such as sovereignty, privilege and race. The discipline is considered strongly interdisciplinary (Charles, Harris, & Carlson, 2016). Growth in Indigenous research methodology has been a significant contribution to the discipline (see for example, Rigney, 1999; Martin, 2008). These theoretical and methodological concerns relevant to Indigenous studies also have application to how we consider and practice the education of Indigenous students (Nakata, 2006) outlined below.

The second area refers to Indigenous students' access, participation and success at university. Practice in this area has focused on growing Indigenous student numbers enrolled in university courses and the often-complex work of guiding individuals from university entry through to completion. Given the persistent under-representation of Indigenous people in higher education there has been a considerable concentration of energy in the undergraduate domain. Although more recently there has been a growing recognition of the need to address under-representation in the post-graduate arena as well. While much of the research has also focused on undergraduate students there is a growing body of inquiry in postgraduate, including doctoral success (Trudgett, 2011, 2014) and the roles, and additional workloads and cultural awareness responsibilities, of academic staff (Asmar & Page, 2009; Page & Asmar, 2008).

3. Indigenous higher education: Present and predictions

In the section above we have drawn together some of the strands of activity undertaken by Indigenous people at the national level. The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council and more recently the National Aboriginal and Islander Higher Education Consortium have amassed evidence and advocated for change in a sector apparently willing but not always able to see either the problem or the solution. In the following section we take three key areas of Indigenous higher education—Indigenous leadership, students and curriculum and explore them in greater depth. We then offer some predictions of what the future might hold in those areas.

Senior Indigenous appointments

Senior management in universities comprise of Executive Deans, Pro Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Vice-Chancellor. These roles are influential at an institutional level necessitating an embodiment and enactment of their institutional values (Fasoli, & Frawley, 2010). We use these levels of appointment to guide our analysis below. Yet until recent times, Indigenous Australians have been under-represented at such levels, meaning that the institutions have too often failed to live by the values implicit in their social inclusion strategic agendas, largely reproducing white dominated inequity (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Australian universities now have a growing number of Indigenous Australians holding the positions of Dean and Pro-Vice Chancellor. In 2011 the University of Sydney took this a step further with the appointment of Professor Shane Houston to the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Strategy and Services. Signalling to the sector that this was a worthwhile appointment for the university, Professor Houston was appointed to a second term in 2016². The University of Sydney's 2015 Annual Report indicates that at the time Houston was remunerated at a rate similar to the other DVCs³. This clearly indicates that the university is prepared to financially back Indigenous leadership. No other university has yet taken up the implicit challenge offered by this bold appointment.

Perhaps the next significant or bold step to occur in this space was in 2016 when the University of South Australia became the first Australian university to introduce two senior Indigenous identified positions at the same university—with Professor Irene Watson being appointed to a newly established PVC Aboriginal Leadership and Strategy and Professor Peter Buckskin maintaining the Dean Aboriginal Engagement and Strategic Projects position. It is worth noting that both these positions were designated to staff already employed within that institution (Professor Peter Buckskin having held the position of Dean for many years), despite the fact that the University of South Australia advertised externally. The appointment of internal staff supports the value of investing in the development of the Indigenous staff already in institutions.

Table I shows the universities which, at the time of writing this paper, have a senior position dedicated to Indigenous matters within their institution. In short, there are 18 senior Indigenous positions across 17 institutions. Analysis of the titles of the senior positions provided in Table I reveals that they share five key themes or areas of focus—education, engagement, leadership, research and strategy. This gives an insight into the broad scope of responsibilities attributed to such positions.

Table 1: Senior Indigenous Appointments in Australian Universities (as at 30/05/2017)

Australian Catholic University	Nil
Australian National University	Nil
Bond University	Nil
Central Queensland University	PVC Indigenous Engagement
Charles Darwin University	PVC Indigenous Leadership
Charles Sturt University	PVC Indigenous Education
Curtin University	Nil
Deakin University	Nil
Edith Cowan University	Nil
Federation University Australia	Nil
Flinders University	Dean Indigenous Strategy and Engagement
Griffith University	Nil
James Cook University	PVC Indigenous Education and Strategy
LaTrobe University	Nil
Macquarie University	Nil
Monash University	Nil
Murdoch University	Nil
Queensland University of Technology	Dean Indigenous Research and Engagement
RMIT University	Nil
Southern Cross University	Nil
Swinburne University	Nil
University of Adelaide	Dean of Indigenous Research and Education
University of Canberra	Dean Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership and Strategy
University of Melbourne	Nil
University of New England	Nil
University of New South Wales	PVC Indigenous
University of Newcastle	PVC Indigenous Education and Research
University of Notre Dame	Nil
University of Queensland	PVC Indigenous Engagement

University of South Australia	PVC Aboriginal Leadership and Strategy Dean Aboriginal Engagement and Strategic Projects
University of Southern Queensland	Nil
University of Sunshine Coast	Nil
University of Sydney	DVC Indigenous Strategy and Services
University of Tasmania	PVC Aboriginal Research and Leadership
University of Technology Sydney	PVC Indigenous Leadership and Engagement
University of Western Australia	Dean of the School of Indigenous Studies
University of Wollongong	Nil
Western Sydney University	PVC Engagement and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership
Victoria University	Nil

It is challenging to comprehend that in 2017 there are still 22 institutions lagging behind the rest of the sector in this domain—as they fail to include an Indigenous specific position within their executive structures. We have intentionally not included positions, such as Assistant Pro Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellors, or Directors, as such positions should not be viewed as being a senior position, but rather a stepping stone towards the introduction of such a senior position. Institutions who have introduced these types of positions clearly still have some distance to travel in terms of acknowledging Indigenous Australians as a core part of the university's senior management team. Hopefully those positions are developmental processes for nurturing future leaders rather than timid institutional responses to peer pressure to have a senior Indigenous appointment.

Some universities have not yet implemented a senior Indigenous appointment with an Indigenous specific portfolio, but have appointed Indigenous people to senior positions that encompass a portfolio inclusive of responsibilities outside Indigenous specific matters. However, such positions have a tendency to include some Indigenous accountability. Examples of these positions include Professor Paul Chandler's position as Pro Vice-Chancellor Inclusion and Outreach at the University of Wollongong, and Professor Ian Anderson's position as Pro-Vice-Chancellor Engagement at the University of Melbourne (seconded to government position early 2017).

It is further interesting to note that the Group of Eight Universities as a collective do not send a clear message one way or the other in this regard, with five of the eight universities having dedicated senior Indigenous positions, and three institutions not having progressed to senior Indigenous

appointments. Moreover, there are no real trends in terms of regional or urban universities supporting, or not, the implementation of such positions. This ad hoc approach can perhaps be viewed as a reflection on how important the Senior Executive and University Council of individual institutions view Indigenous leadership as opposed to a collective trend. What is becoming increasingly obvious is that more and more universities are recognising the value of such positions and they are steadily rising.

Future predictions

In 2040, we expect that every university will have a senior Indigenous appointment and we hope that they are at the Deputy Vice-Chancellor level. We also envisage that in order to achieve parity, at least one of the universities will have an Indigenous Vice-Chancellor. The question of how to best integrate and involve Indigenous people into the leadership structures of institutions is not just an issue for Australian universities. There has been some considerable work already undertaken in North America and New Zealand. In order for universities in Australia to be world-leading institutions, they too need to further commit to this space and ensure they have senior Indigenous people across all levels of governance. Without this, Australia as a nation simply cannot compete internationally when it comes to matters such as social justice, equity or diversity.

4. Indigenous postgraduate students

The first significant study that focused on Indigenous postgraduate students was the dissertation produced in 2000 by the late Indigenous education pioneer Dr Margaret (Margo) Weir - *Indigenous Australians and Universities: A Study of Postgraduate Students' Experiences in Learning Research*. Until then, very little attention or focus was placed on this cohort of students. Following Weir's (2000) seminal piece, Trudgett's (2008) doctoral thesis provided an essential update to this growing area. Despite these and a small number of recent studies (Barney, 2013 for example), there is a paucity of research focusing on Indigenous postgraduate students.

It is reported that the first Indigenous Australian to have earned a doctoral qualification was Dr. Bill Jonas who was awarded a Ph.D. in 1980 by the University of Papua New Guinea (Bock, 2014; New South Wales Board of Studies, n.d.). Trudgett, Page & Harrison (2016) recently estimated that there had been a total of 372 Indigenous Australian doctoral completions between Jonas's doctorate in 1980 through to the year 2014. It is important to note that these figures are only inclusive of completions in Australia and

do not include the small number of doctoral completions earned at international institutions. If we also include the 2015 data provided in Table 2 below, we can offer an updated estimation that there have been approximately 397 Indigenous doctoral completions in Australia up until the end of 2015.

In 2006, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council confidently claimed that the sector would see at least 50 Indigenous Australians graduating annually with a doctoral qualification by 2010 (IHEAC 2006, p. 29). Yet, Table 2 clearly shows that there were in fact only 29 completions in 2010; and furthermore, we are still yet to see 50 Indigenous doctoral completions in any given year. In fact, the largest number of doctoral completions to date is 37, an unexplained spike which occurred in 2011, and since then the numbers have declined. Averaged, the completions have been relatively stable over the last decade; stubbornly short of the prediction.

Table 2: Doctoral completions in Australia 2001 – 2015

YEAR	Doctorate by Research Completions (Indigenous)	Doctorate by Research Completions (Domestic)	% of all Doctorate by Research Completions that were by Indigenous Australians
2001	8	NA	NA
2002	9	4290	0.21%
2003	12	4728	0.25%
2004	11	4900	0.22%
2005	16	4250	0.38%
2006	18	4326	0.42%
2007	26	4405	0.59%
2008	19	4498	0.42%
2009	25	4421	0.57%
2010	29	4456	0.65%
2011	37	4554	0.81%
2012	26	4559	0.57%
2013	29	5090	0.57%
2014	27	5133	0.53%
2015	25	5334	0.47%
TOTAL	317	NA	Average 0.48% (excluding 2001 data)

Table 2 also provides the number of doctoral completions for all domestic students in Australia. Importantly, the most recent data indicates that Indigenous Australians accounted for only 0.48% of domestic completions, despite accounting for 3% of the Australian population (ABS, 2016). In short, this means that we would need to increase the number of Indigenous doctoral completions by a multiple of six in order to achieve parity. It also means that on average Australian universities are failing so miserably in this domain that there isn't even one Indigenous doctoral student graduating at each university every year. Perhaps one of the reasons for such widespread institutional failure is simply because universities do not recognise the value of Indigenous postgraduate students, and importantly what they bring to the academy. Trudgett (2014) explains:

Investing in doctoral students is, arguably, investing in the future of our disciplines, universities, sector and the knowledge production chain. Such a venture must be taken seriously and should at no point be compromised by sub-standard support or structures (p.1036).

It is difficult to accept that any senior executive has not been willing to appropriately resource Indigenous postgraduate students because they were simply unaware of such issues. After all, it is a key responsibility of the senior executive to be informed by the latest reviews into higher education, regardless of their focus. It is vital that senior executive be well informed in order to effectively lead their various institutions through a whole of university approach to enhancing Indigenous outcomes in postgraduate success as indicated in the *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020*. In recent years there have been a number of reviews that have mentioned Indigenous postgraduate students as a specific cohort requiring unique resources. For example, the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* urged universities to begin considering Indigenous higher degree by research (HDR) students in their overall business plan (Behrendt et al., 2012).

Then, in 2016 the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) released a *Review of Australia's Research Training Scheme* in which they noted that 'Initiatives to encourage Indigenous people to undertake HDR training would benefit not only individuals and communities, but would also have a significant benefit to the research system and the nation's prosperity and well-being' (2016, p. 94). Further, recommendation 11 of the ACOLA Review stated that:

...Indigenous researchers have much to offer the nation and their communities, but participation by indigenous candidates in HDR training and employment of Indigenous people remains low. Targets and specific measures, such as increased weighting for Indigenous HDR completions through the Research Training Scheme block grant, have the potential to acknowledge the value to the nation and the universities of Indigenous participation in HDR training. Incentives are also needed to support the training of Indigenous HDR candidates such as higher value stipend scholarships and real-wage competitive fellowships (2016, p. 106).

It is however, important to acknowledge that some institutions are indeed taking this cohort seriously and showing a real commitment to providing Indigenous postgraduate students with the greatest opportunities for success. We believe that a strong example of best practice is the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) (where the first two authors of this paper are located). UTS has a competitive scholarship scheme where Indigenous postgraduate students can, if successful, receive a \$50,000 per annum scholarship stipend. UTS went from having a strong cohort of 23 Indigenous HDR students in 2016 to 33 in 2017. There is considerable academic and pastoral support for this cohort offered through dedicated HDR admissions support, six Indigenous Professors and a number of other Indigenous staff with supervision capacity, and at least three Indigenous Centres with particular research foci. The Centre for Advancement of Indigenous Knowledges (CAIK), at the time of writing this paper, houses eight Indigenous HDR students along with two non-Indigenous students. This is a significant achievement for a Centre with only three academic staff—particularly given it is more HDR students than many other institutions have across an entire Faculty or even the university in some instances. CAIK prioritises the research development of students and offers a unique suite of support. In the case of UTS, the Vice-Chancellor, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research have jointly committed to this initiative, understanding its importance to not only UTS but also the wider Australian community. Recently, a number of universities have advertised enhanced graduate research scholarship packages—the Poche Centre at the University of Queensland and the University of New South Wales being two examples. If the UTS experience is indicative, there is a sizeable untapped potential cohort of postgraduate researchers awaiting the right blend of opportunities and support.

Future predictions

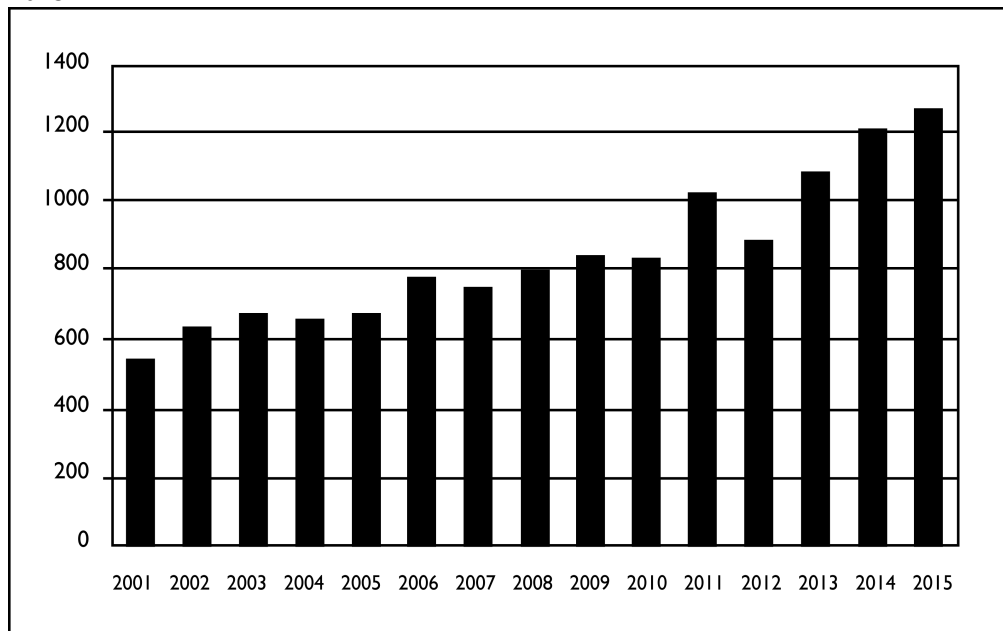
It will be interesting to revisit the Indigenous postgraduate completion data in 20 years' time and see how this may have changed. Of particular interest would be how each institution will have fared. In 2040, if overall data is to improve—and considerably as is required to achieve parity—then individual institutions will have to do more. We believe that Indigenous students are becoming savvier and will increasingly choose institutions according to factors such as financial support (including scholarships and employment opportunities), supervision (specific discipline expertise and the opportunity to be supervised by an Indigenous academic) and institutional reputation (based on both international institution ranking and also cultural reputation amongst the Indigenous community). This will be a game changer and institutions who want to succeed in this domain will need to change the way in which they are currently playing the game. Postgraduate study is a logical, if not singular, conduit to academic work. If universities invest in this area, they foster growth in research *and* their future workforce.

5. Indigenous undergraduate students

Recent initiatives undertaken by federal government, universities and secondary schools, have produced a clear rise in the participation levels of Indigenous Australians in higher education (ABS, 2011). Indigenous students comprise 1.6% of all domestic on-shore students (DET 2017) representing a 74% increase of Indigenous undergraduate students, from 7,038 in 2008 to 12,240 in 2015 (Universities Australia 2017b). Whilst there has been a steady rise over the last 15 years, this has been quite slow. Importantly, if we shift our focus from enrolments to completions, it becomes evident that Indigenous Australians accounted for only 1,269 of the 160,342 Bachelor degree completions recorded in the most recent data (DET 2015). This equates to only 0.95% of all domestic Bachelor degree completions, despite Indigenous people accounting for 3% of the Australian population (ABS 2016). This rate should be revised with each census to account for population growth. In order for parity to be achieved, these 1,269 completions would need to be tripled with a target of 4,009 completions. Despite growth in participation by Indigenous Australians at the undergraduate level, the increase is not in proportion with their representation in the Australian population. It is abundantly clear that even in 2017, there is a significant amount of improvement needed—even at the most basic level of higher education Figure 1 below shows the number of Bachelor degree completions by Indigenous Australians between the years 2001-2015. There continues to be significant hurdles to success in higher

education for Indigenous Australian undergraduates, namely lack of support, including financial, academic, and pastoral care (Andersen, Bunda & Walter 2008; Asmar, Page, & Radloff, 2014; Behrendt et al., 2012; Oliver, Grote, Rochecouste, & Dann, 2016).

Figure 1: Bachelor degree completions by Indigenous Australians – Years 2001-2015



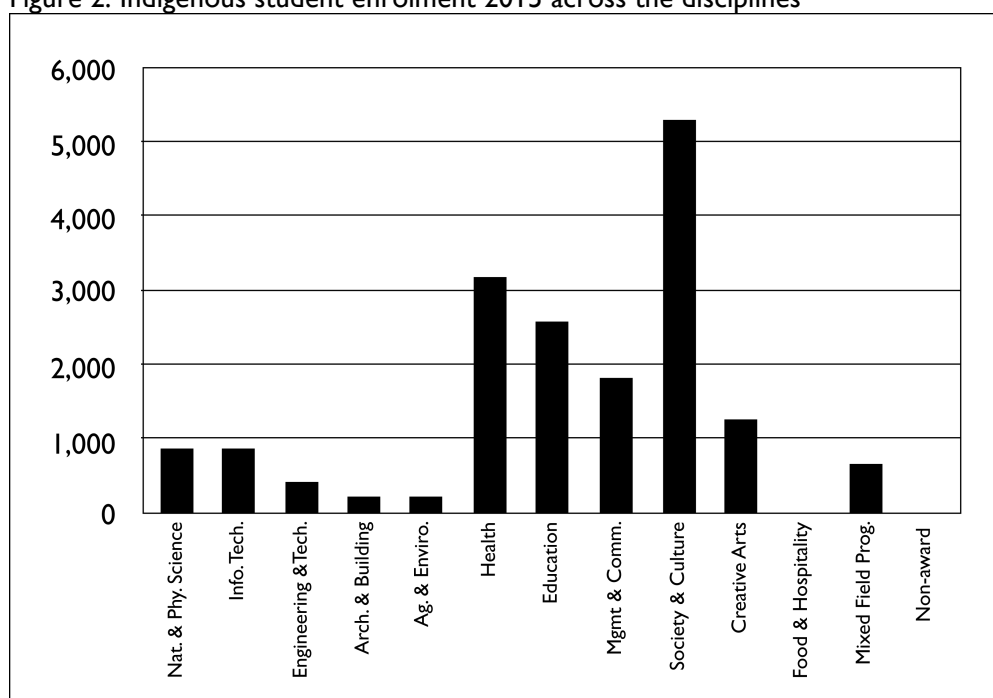
Data compiled from: <https://www.education.gov.au/selected-higher-education-statistics-2015-student-data>

Whilst the growth in Indigenous undergraduate figures is a slow burn, the most interesting point to note in this increase is that these figures are growing despite the decrease of Indigenous undergraduates enrolling in block-mode programs. Block-mode programs, also referred to as mixed-mode, or reverse block release, are nationally accredited courses delivered through a combination of intensive residential or face-to face teaching, and distance education (Willems 2012). Block mode programs were developed to assist Indigenous students to access tertiary study while staying in their own communities (Asmar et al., 2011). While this delivery mode increased Indigenous participation at tertiary level, the completion rates are less than 50 percent (Radloff & Coates 2010). The disengagement of Indigenous students in block mode has been a continuing challenge for universities and in some instances has led to the demise of these programs. The decline in participation and completion of students in block mode programs is likely to

point to a range of factors including academic, financial and social issues faced by students. These programs are sometimes seen to be of a lower academic standard in comparison to mainstream courses, compelling both students and staff alike to defend the legitimacy and authenticity of these programs (Patton, Lee Hong, Lampert, Burnett, & Anderson, 2012).

The decrease of Indigenous undergraduates from block mode programs suggests that there has been an increase of Indigenous students participating in mainstream courses. Indigenous undergraduates now study across a broad range of disciplines. Although it is clear in Figure 2 that Indigenous students are continuing to gravitate towards health, education and social sciences, there are increasing numbers of Indigenous students in the science, technology, engineering & mathematics (STEM) areas. However, Indigenous student's participation in tertiary STEM subjects requires marked growth to reach parity with other fields of study and with non-Indigenous students (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council, 2015). The increase in enrolments in mainstream courses highlights a marked turn in the way in which Indigenous students are establishing themselves in tertiary education.

Figure 2: Indigenous student enrolment 2015 across the disciplines



Data compiled from: 2015 Indigenous Students, Department of Education and Training.

Although it is pleasing to see growth in Indigenous enrolments numbers across a broad range of disciplines, it remains the case that universities are still focusing on access and participation. However, in order to move forward universities must also consider success. Success would be achieving parity with non-Indigenous peers with Indigenous undergraduates more evenly spread across the disciplines. It is not enough to have Indigenous students accessing, or simply participating at a tertiary level. Institutions need to actively find measures to ensure Indigenous students are completing their degrees, and have the opportunity to continue with further studies.

Future predictions

Looking to 2040, we anticipate that the numbers of Indigenous undergraduates will continue to grow. The shift from block mode to mainstream participation signifies that Indigenous students are a changing cohort with fluid needs. We suspect that in 2040 there will no longer be many block mode programs, rather we anticipate that Indigenous students will perform alongside their mainstream cohorts in diversified disciplines. Measures are currently in place to increase enrolments in areas where Indigenous students are underrepresented such as STEM and we expect that this movement will be fruitful with the right resourcing. Further universities are under increasing pressure to improve their performance in the area of Indigenous student participation. As more Indigenous people enrol in courses across the tertiary sector it is envisioned that this will lead to higher completion rates, however a robust emphasis on success for all students who enrol, is required. We predict that by 2040 the sector will have not just achieved parity but surpassed it. Indigenous students will be less likely to be first in family to enter higher education— indeed they will be third or fourth generation and be well acquainted with the tertiary sphere. The success in Indigenous undergraduate completions will lead to higher enrolments in post graduate studies, and Indigenous peoples in leadership and executive positions in higher education institutions.

6. Graduate capability in Indigenous Australian contexts

More than twenty-five years ago the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody incisively revealed a need for improved education of non-Indigenous people in relation to Indigenous Australian history and culture. The report specified the value of history ‘because what is known is known to historians and Aboriginal people; it is little known to non-Aboriginal people’ (Johnston, 1991 p. x) indicating that better education of non-

Indigenous people, across a range of professions, was vital to prevent the dereliction of duty and care so starkly apparent during the Commission hearings. In the intervening years, mounting evidence of both failure of professions education and the need to address inequality, has galvanised some action. The appeal for enhanced Indigenous education has not gone unheeded, yet despite some considerable gains, particularly in the professions, this recommendation remains only partially fulfilled. Enhancing the prominence and status on campus of Indigenous culture, knowledge and studies was a key priority of the first Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC, 2006). More recently the Behrendt Review (2012) indicated an ongoing need to embed Indigenous perspectives into curriculum, and graduate outcomes, considering it:

...imperative that graduates across a range of faculties are exposed to and build their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contemporary issues and perspectives. Such knowledge will help to equip them as professionals to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations with whom they will be doing business and to whom they will be providing services (p. 94).

Universities Australia have taken up this challenge in their Indigenous Strategy indicating institutions should ensure all students engage with “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content as integral parts of their course of study” (2017a, p. 30). While these documents afford an imperative for action, they provide less direction about how to achieve such outcomes, or who might best lead the action.

This work of embedding Indigenous perspectives is already occurring in a number of ways. In some disciplines, particularly those in health for example, Indigenous Australian curriculum is mandatory due to registering authority requirements (e.g. medicine, nursing, psychology and allied health). Education is also required to ensure that initial teacher education graduates are competent in relation to two Indigenous Key Focus Areas mandated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. However, new graduates are least comfortable or confident teaching in schools where there are significant numbers of Indigenous students or teaching Indigenous curriculum (Mayer, Allard, Bates, Dixon, et al., 2015; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). This combination of discomfort and low confidence would suggest that more could be done in the undergraduate curriculum.

To address embedding Indigenous perspectives in the broader curriculum, some universities have developed Indigenous specific graduate

attributes while others have developed extensive 'Indigenising' projects (Phillips & Whatman, 2007). In addition, there are a number of other ways that university students learn about Indigenous Australia. Many universities offer an introductory Indigenous studies subject, often delivered by the Indigenous Centre or stand-alone Indigenous studies departments. Some students will choose Indigenous focused units delivered by discipline areas other than Indigenous studies such as history or environmental science. Some students will undertake subjects in which an individual teacher has an interest in Indigenous perspectives and includes a weekly topic and possibly an assessment option related to Indigenous Australia. In a few institutions students must complete a 'hurdle' component, introducing Indigenous Australia in non-credit learning modules. The repeated calls for better education in relation to Indigenous Australia suggest there is considerable room for improvement in making this topic area part of the routine and systematised processes of curriculum development in all disciplines.

Many Australian universities are grappling with how to best ensure that graduates are able to work effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities (see for example McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011). The challenges, particularly in relation to adequate resources, including Indigenous academics, and staff enthusiasm, are manifold (Anning, 2010). The institutional strategic infrastructure which can either facilitate or impede these potentially complex is also often not apparent. Taking a bold step, in February 2015, the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) appointed three senior Indigenous staff to lead a university wide, Indigenous Graduate Attribute (IGA) project, focused on developing graduates with 'Indigenous professional capability' (Sherwood, McDaniel & McKenzie, 2013). This transformative agenda was preceded by detailed planning and a broader institutional social justice agenda which had cultivated significant receptivity for the multifaceted project. Commitment of this magnitude is likely to be required to successfully complete projects of this scale, which involve not only academic staff attention, but also appropriate governance and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure sustainability. Consequently, it is unlikely that the commitment made by Universities Australia in their Indigenous Strategy can be achieved without the Indigenous academics, who remain such a small part of the overall workforce.

Future predictions

Sustainable curriculum change requires dedication and resources. Universities Australia's agreement that all universities have plans in place for ensuring graduates engage with Indigenous perspective in their degrees by

2020, suggests that there is commitment. We could realistically expect then by 2040 no student will graduate from an Australian university without encountering some Indigenous perspectives. The *quality* of the engagement with Indigenous Australia though is less certain. Human resources will be required, including experienced Indigenous academics, who can lead the change. Employing inexperienced, junior staff for such projects is ill-advised and “fails to encompass the university wide, systematic action which is likely to lead to the enduring structural and institutional cultural change required to genuinely Indigenise the (whole) curriculum” (Page, Trudgett & Bodkin-Andrews, 2016, p. 262). Project funds will also be required to enable the necessary discipline specific development. The now defunct Office of Learning and Teaching funded a number of nationally significant Indigenous curriculum projects (for example, social work and psychology), particularly in the professional and health disciplines. Although universities are expected to take up this funding, in the current fiscal environment it is not clear to what extent this will occur. Progress is likely to be inconsistent and protracted without this kind of resourcing to transform general principles into curricula practice. As leaders in this area emerge, there will be great potential for innovation and cross-institutional collaboration.

7. Conclusion

Despite the frequently lamented barriers to success in higher education for Indigenous Australians, in 2017 there is some cause for celebration and quiet optimism. Arguably in some universities Indigenous Australians are no longer on the margins, but central to the institutional mission; recognised for their intellectual and professional contributions. It is not however a time for reducing our efforts. Universities Australia’s Indigenous Strategy acknowledges that Indigenous success in universities is both an important national project and a project of national importance. No university is doing exceptionally well in all areas of Indigenous Education, although some clear frontrunners are emerging. Every university in Australia should aspire to have a senior Indigenous position, trusted and supported to drive whole of university approaches to Indigenous success. Parity in Indigenous undergraduate and postgraduate completions will fuel higher education sector growth in workforce and research as well as contributing to Indigenous communities. Vast numbers of graduates entering employment with the capacity to work effectively with and for Indigenous Australians is an ambitious aspiration with genuine transformative potential. Predicting what the sector might look like in 2040 has been a gratifying task, but also one we approached with some trepidation. It is ultimately an informed

guessing game—one where we have used data available to us and consequently made inferences. It would be interesting in 2040 to revisit these predictions and to chart the subsequent progress. After all, it is crucial that we revisit the past in order to know how we should approach the future.

8. Notes

1. The third council was called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council.
2. Professor Houston has since left the university and an acting DVC ISS was appointed in 2017.
3. Annual income of \$435,819 with a \$59,730 bonus (University of Sydney, 2015 Annual Report).

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